

# TV election debate in Germany: All candidates stand for herd immunity, mass layoffs and welfare cuts

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15 September 2021

Rarely has an election campaign been so detached from social reality as this year's campaign for the Bundestag (federal parliament). This was underlined by the penultimate TV debate between the candidates for chancellor of the Christian Democrats (CDU), the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens, broadcast simultaneously on both main TV channels on Sunday evening.

The three-way debate between Olaf Scholz (SPD), Armin Laschet (CDU) and Annalena Baerbock (Greens) was held in Berlin-Adlershof on the outskirts of the capital, but it seemed like something from another world. All major social developments were blanked out, since all the parties pursue the same ruthless policies in the interests of the super-rich.

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the 93,000 deaths in Germany were not even mentioned. All three candidates had previously ruled out a lockdown, which would be necessary to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Instead, they have promoted policies that place the profits of banks and corporations ahead of people's lives.

The only issue under debate was how to increase vaccination rates, although with the spread of the Delta variant, vaccinations alone can never be sufficient to bring the pandemic under control. With the enforcement of in-person schooling, millions of unvaccinated children are left defenceless and exposed to infection so that their parents can work and generate corporate profits.

Instead of saving lives, all the parties in the Bundestag have gifted billions to the super-rich. According to data from the US business magazine *Forbes*, German billionaires recorded an increase in wealth of \$178 billion in 2020!

A recent analysis by Oxfam found that the world's 2,690 billionaires would still be \$55 billion richer than

they were at the start of the pandemic even if they gave away 99 percent of their 2020 profits on a one-time basis. This money, according to Oxfam, would be enough to pay for the vaccination of every single person on the planet and, in addition, transfer 17,000 euros to every one of the world's unemployed.

In light of these figures, the staged dispute during the debate over tax increases could hardly be surpassed in absurdity. While Laschet categorically ruled out any tax increase, Scholz advocated raising the top tax rate for very high incomes by just 3 percent.

The last SPD-led government, headed by Gerhard Schröder, had cut the top tax rate by 11 percentage points. At the time, Scholz, as SPD secretary-general, played a leading role in implementing Schröder's "Agenda 2010," which, in addition to tax cuts and pension reductions, promoted the creation of a huge low-wage sector.

By refusing to tax the rich, all three parties participating in the debate made it unmistakably clear that they would far eclipse this policy and squeeze the hundreds of billions transferred to the corporations and the super-rich out of the working class.

That is why the mass layoffs in industry were not mentioned at all. What is already being pushed through at Opel, Continental and Daimler will reach completely new dimensions after the elections. In the auto industry alone, 500,000 jobs are up for grabs. The same workers, who were forced into completely unsafe workplaces under pandemic conditions, are now to be put out on the street.

In this general attack on the working class, the employers and stock owners can rely on the new federal government, regardless the new chancellor's party affiliation.

This is evident in the current train drivers' strike, which also received no mention. The federal government is

trying to make an example here. The train drivers are to pay for the crisis with real wage losses and, at the same time, be subjected to the control of the main trade unions in order to suppress any resistance. This is to be extended to the entire working class after the elections. But all these issues were carefully sidestepped in the debate.

With regard to climate change, which was loudly argued over in the debate, all the candidates are pursuing a program that is oriented toward the interests of big business rather than the needs of ordinary people and the environment. Laschet demanded “creativity instead of regulations and bans.” He wants to speed up the approval process for construction projects and relieve companies of red tape—in other words, eliminate environmental and worker safety standards.

Baerbock also presented climate policy as an opportunity for big business. Even the *Financial Times*, the authentic voice of European finance capital, noted with satisfaction the extent to which the Greens had submitted to the interests of business.

“Baerbock’s ‘pact with industry,’ aimed at helping the country’s businesses cope with climate change, shows how much her party’s relationship with the corporate world has changed,” the finance paper commented on Monday.

The German Institute for Economic Research has just published a study proving that even the rosy promises of all the election programs would not be adequate to achieve even the climate targets set by law, let alone keep global warming below the critical 1.5 degree increase.

In the preceding debates, the candidates had given assurances that they would assert the interests of the German economy internationally, including by force of arms. From the debacle in Afghanistan, which revealed the brutal nature of the Western powers’ war of occupation, all parties drew the conclusion that Germany would have to rearm even further. In the debate they sought to outdo one another in declarations of support for strengthening the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and implementing an aggressive foreign policy that, in the words of Green candidate Baerbock, “does not duck away.”

In every single area of policy, all of the Bundestag parties agree on the broad outlines, and in every single area the line is determined by a ruthless class policy that is rejected by the vast majority of the population.

That is why the debate took on such an artificial character. All the candidates were at pains to hide their real program behind all sorts of platitudes and

smokescreens. In the media, too, one found nothing about the parties’ plans. Instead, the coverage resembled a sports report: Who scored a hit? Who went on the offensive, etc.?

When the grand coalition consisting of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and the SPD was voted out of office four years ago, the parties spent four months negotiating behind closed doors over the continuation of the hated government constellation. In this way, they made the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) the official opposition party, while they themselves pursued the extreme right-wing policy of unrestrained enrichment of the ruling class, culminating in their common herd immunity response to the pandemic.

Similar talks behind the backs of the population are taking place again. This was very evident in the debate, which was watched by 11 million viewers. The event was based on an agreement not to address any of the issues that move millions of people.

Regardless of which parties form the next federal government, the homicidal coronavirus policies will continue and the hundreds of billions given to the rich will be recovered from workers through mass layoffs and wage theft.

Workers must formulate their own class policies and confront the entire party cartel.

This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) stands for in the federal elections. The SGP provides a socialist perspective for the widespread opposition to the right-wing policies of all the Bundestag parties and unites workers around the world in the struggle against militarism, mass layoffs and the criminal coronavirus policies.

Register now to actively support our election campaign!



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